CLAIMS:

1. A community-based collaborative knowledge system which can be connected to a plurality of client terminals via a network, and supports knowledge

5   accumulation by categorizing and accumulating messages posted from each client terminal to a virtual community, comprising:

access control means for making user authentication of a client terminal as an access

10 request source so as to permit the client terminal to post a message; and

community processing means for managing a virtual community in which a plurality of client terminals can participate, and categorizing and accumulating messages

15 posted, to the virtual community, from the client terminals, which are granted access permission by said access control means, for respective topics,

said community processing means including:

user access limiting means for managing a

20 community type indicating an open level of each virtual community, and a member type indicating a participation attribute of a user to the virtual community, and determining user's access authority of each client terminal using a combination of the community type and

25 member type for each virtual community as an access destination.

2. A system according to claim 1, wherein said

user access limiting means determines an access that a client terminal as an access request source can make on the basis of the combination of the community type and member type, and provides a window which allows only the determined access to the client terminal as the access request source.

3. A system according to claim 1, wherein when the virtual community has a community type "membership" for only a group of authorized members, said user access limiting means permits a user whose member type for the virtual community is "member", to post and browse messages, and inhibits a user whose member type for the virtual community is unauthorized "intending member" or "anonymous member", from posting and browsing messages.

4. A system according to claim 1, wherein said community processing means further comprises means for managing summary messages which summarize messages accumulated in the virtual community for respective topics, and

when the virtual community has a community type "membership" for only a group of authorized members, said user access limiting means permits a user whose member type for the virtual community is "member", to post and browse all messages including the summary messages, and permits a user whose member type for the virtual community is unauthorized "intending member" or

"anonymous member", to browse only summary messages having an open attribute of the summary messages in the virtual community.

5. A system according to claim 1, wherein the community type of each virtual community includes "open" that allows everyone to participate, "membership" for only a group of authorized members, and "closed" that is not open to the public other than authorized members,

the member type indicating the participation attribute of the user includes "member" who has been authorized to participate, "temporary registered member" who is temporarily registered as a member, "intending member" who has applied to participate but has not been authorized to participate yet, and "other", and

said user access limiting means determines accesses that the client terminal as the access request source can make on the basis of combinations between the "open", "membership", and "closed" community types, and the "member", "temporary registered member", "intending member", and "other" member types.

6. A system according to claim 1, further comprising search means for searching messages accumulated in virtual communities in response to a search request from the client terminal, and

wherein said user access limiting means provides a

search result list consisting of message search results
that browse authority of the client terminal as the
search request source can cover of messages which match
the search result on the basis of a combination of the

5   community type of the virtual community which is to
undergo search, and the member type of the client
terminal as the search request source for the virtual
community.

7.   A user access limiting method in a

10   community-based collaborative knowledge system which
can be connected to a plurality of client terminals via
a network, and supports knowledge accumulation by
categorizing and accumulating messages posted from each
client terminal to a virtual community, comprising:

15   the access control step of making user
authentication of a client terminal as an access
request source so as to permit the client terminal to
post a message; and

the community processing step of managing a

20   virtual community in which a plurality of client
terminals can participate, and categorizing and
accumulating messages posted, to the virtual community,
from the client terminals, which are granted access
permission in the access control step, for respective

25   topics,

the community processing step including:

the user access limiting step of managing a

community type indicating an open level of each virtual
community, and a member type indicating a participation
attribute of a user to the virtual community, and
determining user's access authority of each client

5 terminal using a combination of the community type and
member type for each virtual community as an access
destination.

8. A method according to claim 7, wherein the
user access limiting step includes the step of

10 determining an access that a client terminal as an
access request source can make on the basis of the
combination of the community type and member type, and
providing a window which allows only the determined
access to the client terminal as the access request

15 source.

9. A method according to claim 7, wherein the
user access limiting step includes the step of
permitting a user whose member type for the virtual
community is "member", to post and browse messages, and

20 inhibiting a user whose member type for the virtual
community is unauthorized "intending member" or
"anonymous member", from posting and browsing messages,
when the virtual community has a community type
"membership" for only a group of authorized members.

25 10. A method according to claim 7, wherein
messages accumulated in the virtual community include
summary messages which summarize the messages for

respective topics, and

the user access limiting step includes the step of permitting a user whose member type for the virtual community is "member", to post and browse all messages including the summary messages, and permitting a user whose member type for the virtual community is unauthorized "intending member" or "anonymous member", to browse only summary messages having an open attribute of the summary messages in the virtual community, when the virtual community has a community type "membership" for only a group of authorized members.

11.   A method according to claim 7, wherein the community type of each virtual community includes "open" that allows everyone to participate, "membership" for only a group of authorized members, and "closed" that is not open to the public other than authorized members,

the member type indicating the participation attribute of the user includes "member" who has been authorized to participate, "temporary registered member" who is temporarily registered as a member, "intending member" who has applied to participate but has not been authorized to participate yet, and "other", and

the user access limiting step includes the step of determining accesses that the client terminal as the

access request source can make on the basis of combinations between the "open", "membership", and "closed" community types, and the "member", "temporary registered member", "intending member", and "other" member types.

12. A method according to claim 7, further comprising the search step of searching messages accumulated in virtual communities in response to a search request from the client terminal, and

wherein the user access limiting step includes the step of providing a search result list, consisting of message search results that browse authority of the client terminal as the search request source can cover of messages which match the search result, on the basis of a combination of the community type of the virtual community which is to undergo search, and the member type of the client terminal as the search request source for the virtual community.

13. A program used in a community-based collaborative knowledge system which can be connected to a plurality of client terminals via a network, and supports knowledge accumulation by categorizing and accumulating messages posted from each client terminal to a virtual community, said program making a computer execute:

the access control step of making user authentication of a client terminal as an access

request source so as to permit the client terminal to post a message; and

the community processing step of managing a virtual community in which a plurality of client terminals can participate, and categorizing and accumulating messages posted, to the virtual community, from the client terminals, which are granted access permission in the access control step, for respective topics,

the community processing step including:

the user access limiting step of managing a community type indicating an open level of each virtual community, and a member type indicating a participation attribute of a user to the virtual community, and determining user's access authority of each client terminal using a combination of the community type and member type for each virtual community as an access destination.

14. A program according to claim 13, wherein the user access limiting step includes the step of determining an access that a client terminal as an access request source can make on the basis of the combination of the community type and member type, and providing a window which allows only the determined access to the client terminal as the access request source.

15. A program according to claim 13, wherein the

user access limiting step includes the step of
permitting a user whose member type for the virtual
community is "member", to post and browse messages, and
inhibiting a user whose member type for the virtual
community is unauthorized "intending member" or
"anonymous member", from posting and browsing messages,
when the virtual community has a community type
"membership" for only a group of authorized members.

16. A program according to claim 13, wherein
messages accumulated in the virtual community include
summary messages which summarize the messages for
respective topics, and

the user access limiting step includes the step of
permitting a user whose member type for the virtual
community is "member", to post and browse all messages
including the summary messages, and permitting a user
whose member type for the virtual community is
unauthorized "intending member" or "anonymous member",
to browse only summary messages having an open
attribute of the summary messages in the virtual
community, when the virtual community has a community
type "membership" for only a group of authorized
members.

17. A program according to claim 13, wherein the
community type of each virtual community includes
"open" that allows everyone to participate,
"membership" for only a group of authorized members,

and "closed" that is not open to the public other than
authorized members,

the member type indicating the participation
attribute of the user includes "member" who has been
5   authorized to participate, "temporary registered
member" who is temporarily registered as a member,
"intending member" who has applied to participate but
has not been authorized to participate yet, and "other",
and

10   the user access limiting step includes the step of
determining accesses that the client terminal as the
access request source can make on the basis of
combinations between the "open", "membership", and
"closed" community types, and the "member", "temporary
15   registered member", "intending member", and "other"
member types.

18.   A program according to claim 13, further
comprising the search step of searching messages
accumulated in virtual communities in response to a
20   search request from the client terminal, and

wherein the user access limiting step includes the
step of providing a search result list, consisting of
message search results that browse authority of the
client terminal as the search request source can cover
25   of messages which match the search result, on the basis
of a combination of the community type of the virtual
community which is to undergo search, and the member

type of the client terminal as the search request source for the virtual community.